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ABSTRACT

Drawing on papers presented at the rural education seminar, "Ensuring Excellence in Education for Rural America," and other sources, the report consists of an overview, examples of excellence, barriers to excellence, areas of continuing need, and appendices dealing with the conference. Highlights from the executive summary include: approximately one-third of the nation's elementary and secondary public school students attend schools in small towns and rural areas; two-thirds of the nation's school districts enroll fewer than 2,500 students; 17 states are predominantly rural; rural school districts average about 20% less spending per pupil than metropolitan districts and have fewer extended services, such as vocational education and preschool programs; and polls show that rural people are generally pleased with their schools. The most important characteristic noted for rural schools, however, is their differences from each other. While there are many strengths stressed for rural education, priorities proposed for rural schools would include: adequately trained teachers and administrators; opportunities to develop rurally relevant curricula; assessment of instructional needs of rural students; long-range planning; sensitivity to the "rural situation" in financing and mandates by state and national officials; and careful examination of the impact of decreased federal funding in rural areas. (BRR)

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# ENSURING EXCELLENCE IN RURAL EDUCATION

November 1982

by

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## Ensuring Excellence in Rural Education

### Executive Summary

Like the small stones that must fit around the big ones to make a strong wall, the small, rural school districts of this country are an essential part of American education.

Well into this century, the public education system was dominated by its rural schools. As recently as 45 years ago there were 150,000 one-room schoolhouses scattered about the countryside; now there are fewer than 1,500. Since then, the number of school districts has dropped from 128,000 to less than 16,000. But so pervasive were the values and structure of these rural schools that they linger today in the perception of what schools should be like.

In numbers of children, these small, mostly rural schools, still are important. Approximately one-third of the nation's elementary and secondary public school students attend schools in small towns and rural areas. Two-thirds of the nation's school districts enroll fewer than 2,500 students.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines as non-metropolitan all areas outside of centers with 50,000 population or more. Under this standard, 17 states are predominantly rural. Finding a satisfactory definition for "rural" is a difficult task. There are many exceptions to any suggested rule, owing to the diversity of rural communities.

Contrary to popular belief, few people in rural areas are farmers (only one in nine). In the South, there is a tremendous concentration of the poor, mostly minority. Forty-one percent of all blacks living outside of metropolitan areas have incomes below the poverty level. Almost all of them live in the South.

Rural school districts average about 20 percent less spending per pupil than metropolitan districts and have fewer extended educational services, such as vocational education and preschool programs. While geographic isolation protects many rural school districts from the social problems of urbanized areas, it also deprives them of the resources of the cities, such as cultural experiences and professional development opportunities. Also, transportation of students in sparsely populated areas is extremely costly and administratively burdensome.

Yet, polls show that rural people are generally pleased with their schools. Those who work in the schools believe they are doing a good job of teaching basic skills. Through a personalized environment, rural schools offer more leadership opportunities to students. Standardized test results show that the greatest improvement in reading has been among younger minority children in the predominantly rural Southeast.

The most important characteristic of rural schools, however, is their differences from each other. They are in farming, fishing, mining or recreational areas; they may be in the tiny communities of Vermont, or spread 100 miles apart in the ranch country of Oregon. One researcher has defined five distinct types of rural schools: (1) stable, white, homogeneous, agricultural and mostly in the West or Midwest; (2) depressed, with marginal sources of income and mostly in the South; (3) high growth, such as the "boom towns" of the energy states; (4) reborn, those mostly in new recreation areas where people are coming by choice; and (5) isolated, such as those on islands or mountaintops.

Another important factor to consider about rural schooling is that for the first time in 160 years the migration pattern reversed in the last decade. More people are moving to rural areas than away from them. While this may be economically advantageous for the communities, rural schools are being asked to deliver varieties and levels of educational services not required before. In addition, they are beginning to face some of the same social problems of more urbanized schools.

There are many strengths in rural education. While urban schools strain to develop community involvement in schools, rural areas abound with it. Community support and involvement run deep in rural schools. The question of retaining a particular rural school can quickly become a community "cause." Rural schools also are pivotal to economic development within a community.

To avoid further consolidation and to strengthen programs, rural schools have found creative ways of cooperating with each other. Often these arrangements are made through educational service agencies. These agencies provide administrative and instructional services and link rural schools to helpful resources, such as the National Diffusion Network and rurally oriented clearinghouses and laboratories.

Rural school districts have experimented with innovative organizational arrangements, such as the four-day week or creative instructional programs, such as the Foxfire project in Georgia.

Although teacher training programs designed for rural settings are scarce, where they do exist they have been very helpful. Likewise, serving special populations is particularly difficult for rural schools, but the results have been truly dramatic in several communities. These include Palmer County, Ala. where black residents became active in school board politics, and Box Elder, Mont. where Indian students were trained to become teachers in their own communities.

The most promising development for rural schools is the integration of new technologies into the rural education programs. Rural educators generally believe technology can provide rural schools with greater flexibility in the curriculum and can help overcome distance, transportation and cost barriers rural schools face in providing quality programs.

Despite impressive strengths, rural schools must cope with problems that consume their energies and limited resources. One that is beyond the capacity of individual rural school districts to solve is that of training for teachers and administrators. Serving in a rural district is a unique professional experience -- with special demands such as learning to live with social isolation and being generalists rather than specialists. There are few opportunities for this special training, however, and the turnover rate among rural teachers is quite high. Teachers raised in rural communities have greater staying power than others, but individuals who relocate to rural communities are a source of new ideas and energy and should be helped to adapt.

The curricula of rural schools must serve two purposes -- to prepare students to appreciate and remain in their communities, or to prepare them to have the confidence and skills to move out. Curricula for rural schools need to be specially designed to meet the unique demands of the rural situation. Rural high schools must prepare their students for a variety of futures, yet their resources are much more limited than those of urban schools. Adequate vocational education is of particular concern, as is adult education.

A lingering problem for rural schools is that of equity -- to provide adequately for the educational needs of the handicapped, minorities, girls -- with limited access to resources and proper funding.

In order to maintain the strengths they already have and successfully meet the challenge of higher standards for education, rural schools will need more help than they have received in the past. The priorities should be:

- Adequately trained teachers and administrators;
- Opportunities to develop rurally relevant curricula;
- Assessment of instructional needs of rural students;
- Long-range planning;
- Sensitivity to the "rural situation" in financing and mandates by state and national officials;
- Careful examination of the impact of decreased federal funding in rural areas;
- Regional, state and national data banks;
- Encouragement for cooperative efforts, especially educational service agencies.

Ultimately, the greatest need is to foster educational leadership in rural communities, building on what is there and providing links for the sharing of good programs and ideas. It is in the nation's rural schools that the country is likely to find its finest leadership in the future.

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## OVERVIEW

An elderly stonemason, carefully building a wall along the side of a country estate, was asked by the owner why he used so many small stones around the large ones.

"They are needed to keep the big ones in place," he explained. "If I leave small stones out, the big ones will not hold and the wall will fall."

Is it not so with rural schools, asks Anne Campbell, commissioner of education for Nebraska? If they are left out of planning for the pursuit of excellence in education, the educational system as a whole will fail.

Strewn about the social landscape of the nation, the big boulders are those that attract one's eyes first -- the concentration of students in large urban and suburban schools where the problems of poverty, illiteracy and social change appear obvious and where examples of excellence are singled out for attention. Not as noticeable are the myriad of smaller stones, more different in color, size and shape than they are alike and, if piled together, impressively reaching to half the measure of the stacked-up boulders.

This report, drawn primarily from the contributions to a national conference in May 1982 on "Ensuring Excellence in Education for Rural America," sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, examines these smaller, far-flung fragments of our educational system. It weighs some of their problems and merits and suggests how to help them fit into a firm, excellent foundation for the American society.

This report contains speeches and discussions from the conference, but also, it searches out other material to reinforce the themes expressed by participants or to illuminate other concerns that consistently appear in literature about rural schools.

Ever since the Northwest Ordinance required pioneer settlers to designate land for the support of a school -- adopted even before our Constitution was approved -- the public school system, until recently, has been dominated by its rural quality. As the country became urbanized, the nostalgia of this legacy lingered so that its values still are intermingled with the perceptions of what schools, even in our most crowded cities, should be like.

As recently as 50 years ago, about half the enrollment currently in public schools was scattered throughout 128,000 school districts; now, there are only 16,000 districts. Millions of today's older adults attended the 150,000 one-room schoolhouses that existed only 45 years ago. Less than 1,500 such schools remain, almost all of them in very isolated areas. Indeed, these small schoolhouses, with their turreted bell towers, pot-bellied stoves and clapboard walls, rapidly are becoming cherished symbols of a past educational heritage.

But to talk of rural education is not to confine the subject to a historical postscript. Nearly one-third of the nation's elementary and

secondary school students attend schools in small towns and rural areas (see chart). Of the nation's 16,000 school districts, 12,000 of them enroll fewer than 2,500 students.

However, to understand their importance, which extends far beyond numbers, we need to look at where they are, their characteristics, and the changes they are experiencing. We then will discuss some of the strengths of rural schools, look at specific problems they face and conclude with recommendations from conference participants.

WHAT IS RURAL?

According to U.S. Census Bureau definitions, metropolitan areas are those with urban centers of 50,000 population or more, including counties and adjacent counties if they are commuter-connected. All other counties are lumped together as non-metropolitan. Under this standard, 17 states still are predominantly rural, four others are almost so. These statistics leave out of the rural definition, however, some states where rurality greatly influences policies and outlook, such as Indiana, Tennessee, Colorado and Utah.

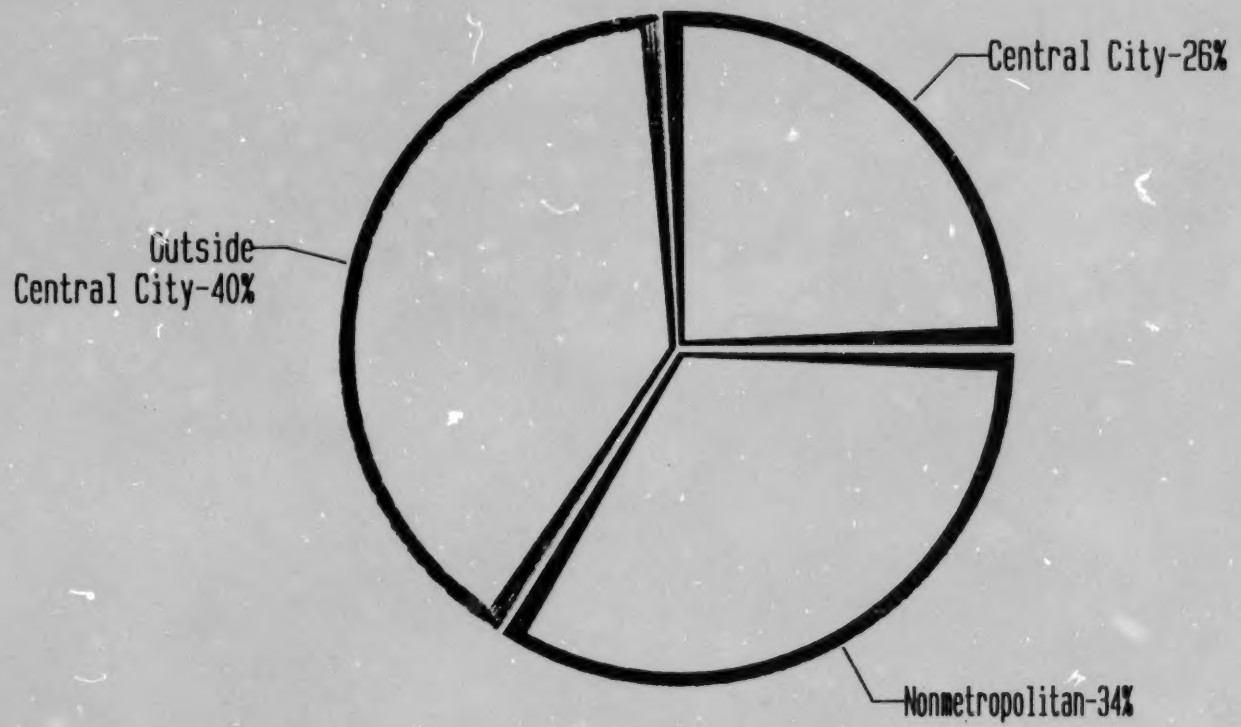
Attempts by federal agencies or other interests to be more specific about what is "rural" usually end in frustration. "Rural is not a term that can be defined in a unique, conceptual, or empirical manner that has general applicability," concluded the Panel on Statistics for Rural Development Policy after it had tried a number of approaches to a definition. Everytime a standard is suggested, the exceptions outnumber the rule.

During the time that school districts were heavily consolidated or eliminated (since 1930), the rural population declined from 43.8 percent of the total to 26.5 percent (1970). Since then, however, there has been a reversal of this trend, which will be discussed more fully later.

What is the adult population like, compared to those living in metropolitan areas? It is older. Few live on farms, and only one out of every nine rural residents farms. The educational level is lower, especially for blacks, and even its poverty is distinctive. As compared to poverty conditions in cities, poverty in some rural areas is more

# NUMBER OF STUDENTS

## *By Metropolitan Status*
## *(43 Million Students)*



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prevalent. The rural poor are more likely to be employed. Poor families are more likely to be intact but in poorer health, and they have less accessibility to health care and adequate housing.

A CONCENTRATION OF THE POOR

We dwell on the poverty aspects because they are a very real determinant of the needs and the resources in education for many rural areas. The wealth of rural school districts varies widely (as we also shall see later). But of the 250 poorest counties in the nation in 1975, according to U.S. Census figures, all were rural, accounting for 40 percent of the poor in the entire country.

While every state has its poor counties, those in the South have disproportionately more. According to 1975 Census statistics, 237 of the 255 poorest counties in the country were located in the South; 41 percent of all blacks living outside of metropolitan areas had incomes below the poverty level -- and almost all lived in the South.

State statistics also are misleading. California is the least rural state, but has the 10th largest rural population. Nevada, with only 20 percent of the population classified as rural, is the third most sparsely populated state with a population density of only four persons per square mile.

Of the population under 25 years of age in rural areas, just under 50 percent lives in the South (96 percent of all rural black youth are in the 16 Southern states). About 30 percent (7.4 million) of rural youth are in the North Central states.

WHAT ARE SOME DIFFERENCES IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS?

The same statistical figure shows up in metropolitan and rural district comparisons -- but represents a total opposite. In 1977, 1.2 percent of the school districts enrolled 28 percent of the public school students. Yet, 26.7 percent of the school districts enrolled only 1.2 percent of the students. These were the districts with fewer than 300 students.

Regional differences in organization of districts follow certain patterns, according to researchers Jonathan Sher and Stuart Rosenfeld. Districts in the South follow county boundaries (where the superintendent frequently is an elected official). Those in the Northeast tend to follow town boundaries, and, consequently, are much smaller. Midwestern states also follow township lines, while the Western states are mixed. The Southwest tends to follow county units and the Northwest is more decentralized and has smaller districts. There are exceptions to these patterns of course. Maine, for example, has more than 100 consolidated school districts that reach beyond town boundaries.

The enrollment disparities in the two states with the largest number of school districts are an interesting comparison. Nebraska's average district enrollment is 121 in its 1,035 school districts while that in Texas, with 1,077 school districts, is 864.

According to 1976-77 statistics, rural school districts average about 20 percent less spending per pupil than urban school districts. Of the 46 states that analyzed expenditures by population density, 35 reported the non-metropolitan areas spent less than the state average. Most of

the states that reported higher non-metropolitan expenditures were in the West with sparsely populated rural areas. The transportation expenditures in their rural areas, for example, were four times greater than in their metropolitan centers.

Less money apparently results in fewer extended educational services. Five years ago metropolitan areas spent far more than rural areas for employment training and vocational education -- a 5-1 ratio in the Southern states. Further, there were 35 percent more of the 3- 5-age group in preschools in metropolitan areas than in rural areas.

The geographic isolation of rural school districts has two sides. On one, the schools are less burdened with problems that arise in more urbanized areas, such as social disturbances and depersonalized administration. Communities, for the most part, are heavily involved with the schools, which often serve as the spoke for community life. On the other side, such isolation deprives teachers and students of the benefits of more populated areas--cultural resources, opportunities to know students from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds, broad career exploration, and avenues for further professionalism, e.g. university courses, teachers centers and regional service agency staff development services.

Another factor which distinguishes rural school districts is their massive effort just to get students to and from school. In Gilmer County, W. Va., with only 1,500 students, buses travel 26,000 miles per month, enough miles each year to make one trip to the moon. Further, a West Virginia statute holds school districts responsible for providing

footbridges across gulleys and streams where needed to make it possible for students to attend school. In some isolated areas in Colorado, school districts pay parents to transport their children to central pick-up points. And in Pima County, Ariz., where tourists flock in the wintertime to enjoy Tucson's sunshine, the county superintendent sometimes has to call school off for the day for students on top of the surrounding mountains because snow blocks the bus routes.

Because transportation distances already stretch the cost and time limits in many districts, declining enrollments present particularly serious problems. Further school mergings are almost out of the question, but as the number of students decreases, so do teachers and offerings.

BRIDGE BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY VALUES

Rural people, generally, are pleased with their schools. A Department of Housing and Urban Development survey (1979) of 1,000 small cities concluded the residents "are proud of their public schools and consider them an asset." Seventy percent of those surveyed rated school facilities either excellent or adequate. Further, the annual Gallup polls on the public attitude toward public schools consistently report the highest satisfaction among residents of small towns and rural areas.

Commenting on the data from a study of the very smallest schools in the country, Faith Dunne, chairperson of the Department of Education at Dartmouth College, found a sincere satisfaction. The majority of the teachers, administrators and school board members "say that their small schools do a good job of teaching basic skills, maintaining good

discipline, keeping the curriculum up to date, controlling alcohol and drug abuse, fostering good communication between teachers, students and parents, and keeping facilities up to date." It should be added, however, that Dunne's study, of schools generally with fewer than 300 students, examined communities that were "stable, relatively white, affluent and west of the Mississippi."

Stereotypes exist of our rural areas in general, but underneath them one discovers the basics -- those common elements that researchers find over and over and that those who grew up or have worked in rural areas testify to with pride.

Rural education researcher Paul Nachtigal found in the countryside the seeds to nourish American society's growing interest in decentralization, or a "demassified society" as he calls it. He described these commonalities in a recent article:

> ". . . in small towns there still exists a personal, tightly knit sense of community. People tend to be generalists, not specialists; there is a minimum amount of bureaucracy; the small size, personal nature of relationships is conducive to shared decision-making; everyone can have their say . . . . The rural culture within which rural education operates still runs more on verbal conversation, verbal agreements rather than written memos. Who said it is likely to be as important as what's said. Time is still governed more by the seasons of the year than a clock. Values are more traditional. The labor force is made up of entrepreneurs rather than corporate employees; rural people are more inclined to make do, responding to environmental forces rather than rational planning to control the

environment. There is more a spirit of self-sufficiency, taking care of one's own problems, than one finds in the city, where problem-solving is left to the 'experts.'"

Jonathan Sher, whose research broke ground and opened many eyes to the unsung vitality of rural schools, believes what makes them unique cannot really be quantified. "The slower pace and less pressured environment, the spirit of cooperation, the opportunities for leadership development, the less formal interactions among students, staff and parents, and other similar qualities that have long been associated with rural schools are not easily measured by the tools of educational research," he maintained.

Tom Gjelten, another researcher who also honors the values of rural schooling, noted one characteristic that has traditionally served the schools well but presents a formidable challenge, as we shall soon see. "Rural people," he said, "have a tradition to preserve, and are less frantic about creating novelties. The identification with that tradition makes choosing less frequent. When in doubt, do what has always been done."

All these virtues might appeal especially to adults, but what do they mean for children? Sher cited numerous studies refuting the "bigger is better" theory of school organization. They show, he said, that when IQ and socio-economic status of students are controlled, those attending small schools are as academically well-prepared as those in the cities. An earlier study of smaller midwestern schools by Roger Barker and Paul Gump found more involvement of students in activities that reinforced their academic work, and

higher quality in that involvement, than was evident in larger, consolidated schools:

> "The proportion of students who participated in district music festivals, and dramatic, journalistic and student government competitions reached a peak in high schools with enrollments between 61 and 150. The proportion of participants was three to 20 times as great in the small schools as in the largest school. The number of extracurricular activities and kinds of activities engaged in during their four-year high school careers was twice as great in the small as in the large schools."

More specific data is available from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Its most recent assessment of reading, for example, indicates that the greatest gains in achievement have been among younger minority children in the predominantly rural Southeast. Rural schools, with their supportive structure, apparently can produce achievement gains that exceed those in city school systems.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR

There remains one characteristic of rural education, more important, more influential on outcomes, than any other. It has been alluded to previously, and its relevancy will remain constant throughout this report.

Rural schools are as different from each other, as they are from the urban systems which so often serve as their contrast.

Gathered under the rubric of "rural" are the schools of Vermont, central to the tiny communities that dot a tiny state and strongly embody the New England tradition of local autonomy, and those of the ranch country of eastern Oregon, where students may travel 100 miles a day to school. There are the schools in bustling ski areas of Colorado and on islands in Maine, reached only, and in winter infrequently, by ferryboats. Our schools in this report may be able to afford carpeted buses, as in western Oklahoma, or be unable to replace dilapidated, hazardous buildings, as in many communities in the rural South.

Looking at their socio-economic conditions, cultural background and demographic characteristics, Gjelten defined five types of small school districts for the rural education conference. They are:

* Stable. This is the closest to the "classic" idea of rural -- white, homogeneous, agricultural, mostly in the West and middle West. They have relatively few problems, and the best education in rural schools tends to be in these stable communities. They always have been willing and able to pay for good programs, but fiscal reforms have caused some problems, as have enrollment declines. Also, their economic base is changing. Of all the types of school districts, reorganization (consolidation) remains an option for many.

* Depressed. These have an underdeveloped economy, marginal sources of income, a moderate to high minority enrollment and an out-migration. There are fewer "in-kind" resources, as well, such as parent volunteers. The overriding question for these schools is should they aim at revitalizing the economy or should they help individual students move on? Generally, they have fewer opportunities to offer quality programs.

* High growth. These schools have new opportunities, both in dollar resources and in people. The issues for schools in these areas have more to do with planning and management, because it is difficult to forecast their needs.

* "Reborn." These are in scenic or otherwise new recreation areas, with high rates of in-migration and new "energies"; people are coming there by choice. But they also are experiencing conflicts between the natives and the newcomers over values, student futures and cultural and social changes.

* Isolated. These are so unique they deserve a special category. Because of enrollment-based formulas, they lack funding, and, as Gjelten has observed before, their isolation now is more profound than in the past "because there is so much more to be isolated from." It is very difficult to teach about the outside world, he said, because students have such little contact with it. A former teacher on a Maine island himself, Gjelten said students in these isolated communities must make choices on their future, but they are less prepared to make such decisions because they have little sense of their options.

With this diversity, Gjelten said, it is difficult to make generalities about excellence in rural schools. There is a wide range of quality that should be celebrated, but there also are many schools in desperate need of help. The answers to improvement, he believes, will lie in a community-defined mix of solutions, combining local resources and outside technology.

A CHANGING SCENE

Let us look at the advent of change for rural schools more closely, lest a framework for achieving excellence in them be limited to a static notion.

Preliminary analyses of 1980 census data confirm Gjelten's description of haphazard growth and decline patterns in rural school districts. Instead of the predictable out-migration from rural areas that occurred for 160 years, the decade of the 1970s experienced a complete reversal. The growth rate in rural and small town communities was higher than in metropolitan areas -- 15.4 percent compared to 9.1 percent. In the decade before, 2.8 million people moved out of the rural and small town counties, but in the period between 1970-80, 4 million moved in, accounting for almost half of the increase in non-metropolitan counties.

The most rapid growth for the schools that concern us was in the West -- a 30 percent increase. However, the average for the "boom towns" -- those sparsely populated areas brought to life by energy developments and resort activities -- was more than 50 percent. Other rapidly growing areas were the Florida peninsula (a 70 percent increase) and suburban counties, some of which will have to be reclassified as metropolitan when the census analyses are completed.

Yet, about 485 counties declined in population and, as Dunne and Gjelten pointed out, these tended to be the "stable" communities -- in the Great Plains and western Corn Belt, where non-farm growth couldn't compensate for the loss in farm population. (Indeed, another conference speaker, Superintendent Roger Baskerville of Lohrville, Iowa, warned that unless the trend from family to corporate farming is reversed, small schools and their communities will not survive in his state.) The other counties with substantial population loss were in the Mississippi Delta. Most of the counties with population decreases were continuing a pattern evident in the 1960s, but 800 counties that had lost population in the 1960s gained it in the 1970s.

In fact, every state except Rhode Island shared in the non-metropolitan growth rate. Both Nevada and New Jersey increased 52 percent, followed by Florida (51 percent) and Arizona (50 percent). Nationally, our population increased more than 10 percent in the decade; South Dakota and Iowa increased their nonmetropolitan populations 2 percent each, but these were the lowest growth rates in the country.

Obviously, some of this growth rate only indirectly affects schools. One could assume, for example, that the Florida and Arizona increases primarily would be among older age groups -- not a factor for direct services but certainly to be considered in assessing tax support for the public schools. The opposite would be true for the boom towns in the West, where some school districts or state legislatures have resorted to requiring energy companies to help with school facilities, supplement teachers' salaries and even provide housing for teachers.

Baskerville, expressing consternation that urbanization and increased corporate farming in Iowa were threatening the state's identity,

commented that neighboring Nebraska "at least knows that it is rural." With more than 400 one-room schoolhouses still scattered around the state (almost a third of those still operating nationally), Education Commissioner Campbell certainly understands the rural quality of her state, but her perspective is on the future for Nebraska's more than 1,000 school districts. Her comments at the conference provide an interpretation of the changes affecting rural America.

The great strength of community life, usually centered around a rural school, remains, she said, but to a lesser extent. "The homogeneity, and its great potential for wholesomeness, stability and quality education, is changing," she said. This includes:

* Greater demands on education. New inventions and discoveries affected production. Changes in agriculture (labor-saving devices, herbicides, pesticides and irrigation) and in transportation brought greater diversity and demands for different services and the need for broader educational opportunities. Rural people no longer assume that equal opportunities are available for their children.

* Changing structure of the community. The population mobility, coupled with rapid air and ground transportation, have changed both the structure of the family and the rural community. In some areas, a majority of the youth leave where they grew up to seek job opportunities; some return, but only to outer rings of metropolitan areas where they commute to jobs. Therefore, "the breadth and quality of rural schools and the third and fourth ring of suburban

youths' educational opportunities will directly affect their potential for appropriate job placement and careers."

* Changing economic base. In recent years, small rural districts have experienced rapid increases in property values, often at twice the rate of more densely settled districts. This is as true for New York as it is for Nebraska. But these increases in property values have brought no corresponding increases in rural income levels. (This was underscored by a September release of U.S. Department of Agriculture figures showing that farm income is at its lowest point since 1933.) Because of squeezes on income, and often a concurrent decline in enrollment, rural districts too often are forced to lower spending levels, narrow offerings and employ fewer teachers, particularly in specialized areas such as vocational education and special education.

* A new diversity in population. Many rural areas are beginning to feel the influence of a more pluralistic society. Certainly strengths of rural schools do include what others have termed a "desirable environment" -- the absence of congestion and a reflection of basic democratic values, such as citizenship, economic independence and individual and group responsibility. However, the spreading problems of a more diverse population, with its accompanying influences of drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy and single-parent families, "have shattered some of our beliefs about the tranquility of the rural setting." Quoting a former state education commissioner, Ewald Nyquist of New York, Campbell added that "our values, attitudes and institutions have been put to test to a degree and in ways which were inconceivable in generations past."

* The new world of work. Science and technology have combined to provide new job opportunities. On the farm and off-the-farm jobs have been affected significantly. Partnerships -- between local districts and state departments -- must be formed to assure rural youth access to vocational and occupational skills to compete in the job market.

* Developments in instructional technology and educational methods. Changes in learning theory with emphasis upon the individual accompanied by a variety of new electronic and mechanical aids, including television and computers, are having a marked impact upon past notions of student-teacher relationships and the role of each in the teaching and learning process. It should be pointed out that even if schools don't use them, many rural youth have access to these new learning devices in their homes.

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Rural schools have weathered tremendous changes in the past. The massive consolidation effort, well-meaning and in many cases justified, nevertheless tore at the core of community values. The most viable, the most isolated, or perhaps just the most stubborn rural communities held on and are witnessing a revival of interest in what they might contribute to our knowledge of effective schooling.

From the comments and observations so far, one distinctive feature of rural education emerges. It is possible to see it as a whole, as the most unifying institution in a community that already is characterized by its homogeneity. So it follows that the parts of the whole can be distinguished more easily than in a more urbanized school environment, with its mixture of students, teaching techniques, resources and bureaucratic layers. We have dealt with some generalities about the "feel" of a rural school setting. Now we need to look at the parts -- at those elements that could be called the strengths of rural education and the adaptions rural education is making to maintain or improve schooling. Before that, we will look at some of the factors standing in the way of excellence.

## WORKING WITH/FOR COMMUNITIES

First, <u>community support</u> and <u>community involvement</u> come from the same well but have a slightly different taste. The former was implied at the rural education conference; the latter was covered in detail.

"Rural folk" often show an almost fierce loyalty to their schools, and this community support has become quite sophisticated in many places. Iowa legislators, for example, would concede readily this point. When a state senator introduced a bill in 1977 to reorganize all districts with fewer than 300 pupils -- a move that would have eliminated the school at Alden -- this tiny (population 876) community fought back. Two housewives launched a lobbying effort, People United for Rural Education, which stopped the bill, spread throughout the state to a

membership of 1,500 and became a symbol for rural education organizers in many other states.

This willingness to make rural schools a "cause" stems from the long tradition of community involvement with schools in rural areas and the centrality of a rural school to community life. Kenneth Palmer, associate professor of educational administration at California State University in Los Angeles, has commented that community advisory groups and citizen involvement only recently have become key concepts in the management of large school systems.

> "Over the years, educators in small districts have looked with wonder and awe at such 'innovative' management programs only to discover that these kinds of things are 'built into the territory' in a small school district. Education in a small school district . . . IS community education without the necessity of imposing another layer of bureaucracy to decentralize the decision-making process . . . ."

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## THE PARENTS OF LEE COUNTY

Lee County, S.C., grows more cotton than any county east of the Mississippi. Poor and predominantly minority (85 percent of the population is black), the school system, with 3,600 students, has benefited heavily from federal aid. It is not the place where one would expect to find a healthy, successful parent/volunteer program. But there they are -- doing playground duty, taking children on field trips, serving as chaperones, helping with reading and math in the primary

grades to give children a one-on-one experience, correcting papers in higher grades -- four to five parents in each school all the time.

"The important thing is that it promotes interaction between the community and the children," Lee County Superintendent Frank Bouknight said at the conference. The schools show they believe community members are important and a valuable resource; volunteers help teachers do a better job and help students feel better about themselves.

In addition, each school in the county has a council elected by the community and including the principal and two teachers. These are "sounding boards" for the schools, Bouknight said, not the school board. By turning problems over to these community councils, "aren't you raising their expectations too much?" the superintendent was asked. "People do a lot better," he replied, "if you expect more out of them."

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## GOALS FOR CASHMERE

In the fruit and logging area around Cashmere, Wash., unemployment is about 18 percent, but the depressed economy hasn't dimmed the enthusiasm of the community to participate in goal-setting at the beginning of each school year. About 300 people usually turn up in a community of 2,000. The school board selects priorities from the goals listed by the community, and these become part of the evaluation of the schools and superintendent.

Last year, for example, the community wanted students rewarded for their academic as well as athletic successes. The school system proposed

that the top-achieving students be given a trip to the East Coast; the parents and the business community in Cashmere agreed and financed the trip. Parents also wanted teachers to help students more as advisers. So, each teacher now is assigned to 15 students, visits their homes, meets together daily with the students and becomes an "extra" adult to talk to about dating, activities and problems. Not able to provide specialists to teach health education, as parents requested, the school system recruited volunteers from the community -- and included parents on the health education program. Superintendent Richard Johnson also reported that 90 percent of the parents participate at secondary school parent-teacher conferences.

Involving the community so closely in decision-making about the schools perhaps carries some risks, Johnson said, "but it's worth it."

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## SERENDIPITY AT MILFORD

When the Milford (Ill.) High School, originally built in 1912 and added on to three times since, didn't meet the state's new building health and safety specifications, there was some talk by the school board and around the community that a new building would have to be constructed. But it didn't work out that way at all.

Said board member Clyde Stimpson: "The community told us that in no way were we to get rid of that old school." So, when board members decided to conduct an audit to determine what physical changes would be needed in the building, they also decided "we needed to know what was going to happen to our kids down the road," according to board president

Jerry Frerichs. What changes were there going to be in agricultural sciences? In computer sciences? What did this mean for the curriculum? The community became involved in looking at the future, discussing the curriculum needs, and turning around the attitude that once graduated from high school, young people "gotta get out." One of the by-products of this involvement, Frerichs said, "has been the redevelopment of pride in the community." It is thoroughly behind the school system's broad computer science project, which this year will require all freshmen students to have keyboard experience. "We even got support for a carpeted gym floor," said Superintendent Henry Hornbeck.

## SCHOOLS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business-school partnerships in rural areas take on some of the same flavor as those of urban areas, with help on school business and finance, volunteer teaching, support services, and perhaps a bit more success in integrating work and school ethics, according to William Grimshaw of Western Michigan University. In Staples, Minn., however, it was the leadership and commitment of the schools that became important to economic development.

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## TOTAL PICTURE FOR STAPLES

Fifteen years ago, Staples was a "one-horse" town, with its only industry the railroad. "The soil in the area was what we called gravel back home in South Dakota," said Jim Hofer, director of the Woodland Cooperative Center at Staples. The school district is relatively large, stretching 30 miles by 60 miles over a harsh landscape that was yielding less and less for the 6,000 residents.

Community leaders came together and asked some hard questions, Hofer said. Are we satisfied to be living in a dying area? Are we committed to giving our families the best? When the community leadership settled on priorities for revitalizing their little town and its countryside, excellence in education was the first, especially quality vocational education. Others were health services, housing, recreational opportunities, cultural activities, jobs, help for churches, the elderly, and the farmer.

The schools became the center for economic development, Hofer said, and school people were encouraged to become very involved with the community. "Every organization president in Staples right now is a school employee," he said.

There were two goals for the Staples community:

* Develop a skilled work force.
* Make Staples a place where families wanted to stay.

The community convinced the state board of education to build a vocational training center at Staples, and vocational training diversified from the traditional agriculture and home economics programs to a broad offering, with the community approving bond issues for vocational education overwhelmingly. Led by Superintendent Duane Lund, the community recruited doctors, dentists and other professionals; constructed high-rise, low-rent units; built new parks and a community center with year-round recreational facilities; established a fine arts council; and revitalized downtown stores.

At the very beginning, the vocational school bought a 320-acre farm for irrigation research. At that time, only three farmers were irrigating their farms; now, more than 300 are. As the vocational school developed skilled workers, new industries were encouraged to locate in Staples. Major ones now include the 3M Company, an optical company, a railroad boxcar repair center, a sportswear manufacturer, a photo reproduction facility and machine shops. Students at the vocational school can get 1,200 hours of machine shop experience and need only six more months in post-secondary training for a two-year certificate, Hofer said.

The community now is looking at a new generation of priorities, all centered around what further education could contribute. These include providing better science training for young people, improving their preparation beyond an entry-level skill and encouraging workers to acquire new skills in technology.

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## EDUCATION, ECONOMICS AND ESKIMOS

With equal fervor, the 4,500 Inupiat Eskimo people of the Northwest Arctic region of Alaska are linking better education to economic development, an incredible undertaking in an area of 36,000 square miles with no road or rail systems connecting the 11 villages with each other or the region with other parts of Alaska. Traditionally, the Inupiat lived marginally off of hunting, fishing and gathering. Currently, the natives have launched a regional strategy that emphasizes human resource development. The Northwest Arctic School District, created seven years ago when the natives gained greater local control of their education system, has established small high school programs in nine of its remote villages. Previously, students who received a secondary school education did so at boarding schools. The school system, said the native school board, must equip its students to have a freedom of choice as adults -- to live in the traditional ways, to be trained for a "cash economy" or to do both. A technical training institute has been built in the largest village, Kotzebue, and the native leadership has designated adult basic education and vocational education as goals for the region.

SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

Turning from examples of strong community involvement, let us look at the involvement of school districts with each other, as a means of survival for many of them.

When the reorganization debate in Iowa merited headlines in the Iowa newspapers, a principal from the small Corwith-Wesley High School wrote the Des Moines Register: ". . . If the taxpayers wish to share football, let them do so. If they wish to keep basketball separate, let them do so. If they make mistakes in these decisions, let the mistakes come from the people who are involved directly. It is easy for people in Des Moines, Davenport or other large cities to say 'reorganize or dissolve.' But these are very tough issues for people in small communities with the fierce pride they feel about their towns and their schools. We see sharing as a step that could lead in several directions. Our concern is that we be allowed to make those choices in our own communities."

The Corwith-Wesley and LuVerne school districts are now in their third year of a "sharing" program, Superintendent Dale Sorensen of Corwith told the conference. The theme of the project, "Sharing to Learn, Learning to Share" developed from community participation, board decisions, specific contracts and legislation.

Both schools send their seventh, eighth and ninth graders to LuVerne, while the three upper grades attend classes at Corwith. The extracurricular activities of band and vocal music are shared by both districts in the Corwith building, but each "group" returns to its home community for athletic programs. Four neighboring districts also share foreign language and adult education programs. This plan, Sorensen said,

provides students with educational offerings that would not be possible if the districts operated independently.

Some types of sharing help students, others just save money, Superintendent Lowell Schwalbe of Atwater, Minn., reported in a 1981 publication on small schools by the American Association of School Administrators. He should know, considering the experience he has had with cooperative programs among school districts, especially at his previous job as superintendent at Morton, Minn.

In teaching, for example, Morton "sells" two-fifths of its counselor's time to a neighboring district, dividing up salary and mileage costs; shares a speech therapist with two other school districts; shares an art teacher with another district; and sells half the time of a learning disabled teacher to a neighboring district.

The school district also cooperates with other districts on coaching assignments for football, volleyball, basketball and music -- primarily at the elementary and junior high levels because varsity competition is too keen, Schwalbe said.

A stationwagon full of Morton students takes agricultural science in a neighboring district. Other students attend a nearby district for special classes Morton cannot offer, such as German, advanced art, science, math and dramatics. A handful of kindergarten students transferred to the program in Morton, allowing it to hire a full-time aide for the class.

In addition to cooperative purchasing, the Morton district shares transportation costs with other districts to athletic events and some extracurricular activities, even those of teachers and administrators attending inservice training programs.

This concept of sharing isn't limited to the stable communities trying to compensate for declining enrollments and tax bases. The Tuscumbia City, Ala., schools have sharing arrangements for standard programs, such as data processing and education of the handicapped. But responding to the particular needs and resources of the community, the schools also cooperate with six other school systems in providing an alternative school for adolescents suspended from their regular schools, with eight other school districts for adult basic education, with six other school systems for an environmental education center developed in cooperation with TVA, and with eight other school systems in a health and information program that includes health screening of students, safety inspections of schools and CPR training for all students and teachers.

"The obvious benefits of these efforts," according to Superintendent Robert Clemmons, "are increased services for our students, greater funding levels, more efficient operation and more and better services than any system could provide individually."

In the Plainfield, Vt. area, eight high schools developed an organization plan that allows a certain percentage of students to attend any of the schools tuition free. Guidance counselors determine those eligible for this "exchange program," usually on the basis of student interest in an academic program offered somewhere else but not at the home school.

Sharing among school districts can be even more creative than these examples. Districts have shared superintendents and other administrative personnel and cooperated on pooling state classroom materials resources and personnel administration costs, such as insurance and workmen's

compensation. Indian tribes have gone together to negotiate teachers' salaries and fringe benefits.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE BRIDGES

Another form of cooperation is growing in rural areas -- that between public and private schools. Headlines, especially from Iowa and Nebraska, portray the private school movement in rural parts of the country as one of the independent, fundamentalist religious school, at odds with officials over complying with state standards. Certainly this friction exists in many places, and accommodations from both sides are difficult to achieve. However, few of these schools seek cooperative arrangements with public schools.

Many others do -- traditional private schools located in the countryside and parochial schools which have shared programs that were federally funded. New requirements under both Chapter I (compensatory education) and Chapter II (block grants) require local school districts to include private schools in their planning for use of the funds. Additionally, each state has its own statutes for the requirements and the types of services that must or can be offered to non-public schools. Positive relationships between public and private schools, Mary Lou Bartley, superintendent of the Riverdell Regional School District at Oradel, N.J., told the conference, "is the key to improved programs for all children." Educators concerned about the community at large must be concerned also "about properly educating kids no matter where they are," she said.

Working in an area with 24 private high schools and 40 small elementary schools, Bartley found that a permanent liaison committee

between public and non-public schools gives school boards and administrators a "vehicle through which concerns can be expressed and solutions explored."

In Oradel, cooperation began through a meeting of administrators, then expanded to the chairpersons of school boards and private trustee groups. Seven years later, this group meets monthly to set policy, and other groups representing public and non-public schools also come together, such as curriculum coordinators and principals.

The schools have joint planning for instructional programs such as driver education, arts and cultural programs, and extracurricular and intramural sports activities. They coordinate transportation, curricula and holidays and even hired a curriculum coordinator to articulate programs between public and private schools. Computer services, library resources and joint purchasing are other forms of cooperation in Oradel.

Not only do the schools share resources and materials and reduce costs, but the students also "tend to socialize more and have fewer prejudices about each other," Bartley said.

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COMING TOGETHER IN REGIONS -- EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

Individual arrangements among school districts are helpful and innovative, but they have their limits. Another resource has developed rapidly in the last two decades -- educational service agencies. Intermediate units have existed for 100 years, but many fell into disuse until the 1960s, when consolidation of school districts reached a saturation point. The intermediate units went through a transformation;

new types were created. Their growth, in fact, has been one of the most important developments in public education in recent years. About 800 service agencies are in place, ranging from a Boston area cooperative to agencies serving the most rural areas of Georgia or Minnesota. Some are units of the state education agency that serve districts but do not provide direct services to students, as in North Carolina. Some are state or quasi-state agencies that do provide programs for students, as the BOCES of New York State. Others are cooperatives of school districts that voluntarily contract with the service agencies for needed programs, as in Pennsylvania.

While they provide resources for all types of school districts, the service agencies, undoubtedly, are of special significance to rural school districts. And they are becoming more so. Directors of these agencies report that as tight budgets cut deeply into local school programs, the school districts are turning more and more to formal arrangements for sharing programs, services, and staff development costs and for providing experiences in new technologies, all more possible by pooling resources through educational service agencies.

## COOPERATION CENTERED AT COLBY

Take the educational technology focus of the Northwest Kansas Education Service Center at Colby. Its director, Hugh Pursel, told the conference about the agency's access to large data bases for research and information useful to isolated and rural special education programs. It catalogs, stores and accesses software data banks through computer networking and provides software and equipment to the districts in its

area to make use of new technologies, such as videodisc-computer interaction and videotapes of public broadcasting programs.

It helps school districts cut costs by sharing consultants and other staff, making cooperative and volume purchases and distributing commodities for school lunch programs. Its portable planetarium, Starlab, brings a resource to students that would be inconceivable for an individual school district to procure. Through its professional development activities, the Kansas center provides training for special education personnel, boards of education, administrators and teachers; recruits personnel for school districts; and provides officials with legislative information and a network. Further, the center is a communications link with the state board of education, the state department of education, the area's congressional delegation and higher education institutions.

All of this is in addition to linking school districts with the national network of exemplary programs, operating a broad media center and providing special education services for the districts in the area.

The important role of agencies such as that in Northwest Kansas was underscored by H. M. Fullerton, director of the Region IX Education Service Center in Wichita Falls, Texas. These centers, he said, can help rural school districts achieve excellence by:

* Ensuring equality of educational opportunity for students.
* Providing cost-effectiveness through regional planning and purchasing.
* Improving the quality of the staff through inservice training programs.
* Enriching the curriculum through cooperative regional efforts.

* Providing services and equipment that would be too expensive for individual districts to purchase.
* Improving school management through cooperative technical assistance.
* Making it possible to have a more competent and varied faculty.
* Responding to the special needs of school districts through "tailormade" programs.

Related to the help rural school districts receive from educational service agencies, and often an integral part of them, is the opportunity to find out about and learn to adopt exemplary programs suited for rural areas through the National Diffusion Network and rural-oriented clearinghouses and laboratories.

Gene Johnson, a facilitator for the National Diffusion Network at Staples, Minn., commented that "no other organization, state, federal or private corporation has benefited as many rural schools in Minnesota in as many areas as has the National Diffusion Network." He estimates that in the last three years, the state has used 60 different projects, accounting for 700 adoptions. At least 500 of these were rural school adoptions, he said. However, because replication funds are no longer set aside, and rural school districts may have to use their block grant funds to maintain programs jeopardized by federal cuts, such adoptions probably will decrease dramatically, Johnson predicted, particularly in rural areas where adoptions generally are more costly.

Several educational laboratories, especially CEMREL, NWREL, RBS And FWL, have developed projects especially for rural schools, and the Rural and Small Schools Education Clearinghouse, as its director Evert Edington

pointed out, provides a central point for information about research, successful programs and general commentary on rural education.

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ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAMMING

In addition to cross-district sharing, whether just next door or on a regional basis, rural school districts have been able to improve the quality of their education programs or cut costs, or both, through innovative organizations and projects.

For example, much attention has been paid recently to an organizational change -- Colorado's experiment with a four-day week for small, rural school districts. Actually, an alternative school calendar for rural districts is not new. Cimmarron, N.M., has been operating on a four-day week successfully for 10 years. Particular concern over energy costs led the 1980 Colorado General Assembly to pass a bill giving local school boards the authority to modify their school calendars, upon approval of the state board of education. The legislation requires school districts to provide data on:

* The impact on students' achievement, with suggested pre- and post-testing comparisons.
* Transportation and facility utilization changes.
* Cost comparisons over previous year's expenditures.
* Staff, parent and student reactions.
* Supportive evidence that pupils' educational opportunities and services are comparable to the 180-day schedule.

Thirteen school districts participated in the experiment in the 1980-81 school year; 23 were using the four-day program in the 1981-82 school year. The districts enrolled 5,200 students.

As Roy Brubacher, assistant commissioner for the Colorado State Department of Education, reported to the conference, preliminary research shows:

* The original districts demonstrated the potential of the schedule to save energy and transportation costs and to reduce student and teacher absenteeism.

* Achievement levels for students on the four-day week are comparable to the same students' achievement prior to the new schedule, and student absenteeism decreased.

* Parents, teachers and students all favor the four-day week over the old schedule by a wide margin. For example, 91 percent of the 767 parents surveyed supported the new arrangement. Percentages for teachers and students were 94 percent and 93 percent, respectively. Many found the advantages to be more than financial. Longer weekends provided more personal and professional opportunities; secondary school teachers reported that the longer class periods during the four days allowed greater instructional flexibility and efficiency.

* Cost savings were notable. Gas consumption by buses and other school vehicles was reduced by more than 22 percent. Bus maintenance costs were reduced by 18 percent, electrical consumption by 23 percent. Additionally, the school districts saved on substitute teachers. On an average, they required 25 fewer substitute days than under a five-week schedule.

"The possibilities the four-day week may offer for educational innovations," Brubacher said, "are limited only by the imagination and creativity of a local community and its school system." These might include the enhancement of work/study programs, better staff development programs, improved curriculum planning, better evaluation of student achievement, and an opportunity for increased time in vocational education, career exploration and on-the-job training on the non-school day.

There are some drawbacks, he added. Community energy costs may not be reduced because the energy use transfers from school buildings to homes; some pupils have unsupervised free time; the school day is long for younger children. But the state department requires the school districts considering the change, all of them small and rural to date, to study carefully and plan for the alternative, weighing its advantages and disadvantages to each community.

An innovative program that draws uniquely from the rural environment is the Foxfire Project at Rabun Gap, Ga. When Eliot Wigginton stumbled onto the idea of motivating his English students by encouraging them to mine the rural heritage around them, he touched a strong chord existing in many rural communities. To date, there are about 150 Foxfire-like projects throughout the country, Gail Parks, rural education specialist from Trevilians, Va., told the rural education conference, and some have been adapted in urban schools as well.

The Foxfire programs, whether searching for the cultural heritage of the Southern Appalachians or the fishing villages of Maine or the islanders of Hawaii, help young people find cultural pride--by using

their own skills in discovering it. Because of their involvement, the students learn vocational skills--editing and writing, photography, marketing, bookkeeping, printing, typing, filing, management, public relations, public speaking and banking. They also learn about self-discipline and cooperation, the interrelationship of learning, an appreciation for literature and art, and, according to a book on the philosophy of Foxfire, Moments, "an inquiring sense of direction from which to explore new subjects, develop new relationships and enter new experiences."

TRAINING TO TEACH IN RURAL SCHOOLS

There is both a bright and a dark side to this issue. There are some successful programs that are encouraging and developing teacher training programs specifically tailored for the needs of rural schools--but there aren't enough of them. Here, we want to talk about the successes.

Not until the Career Opportunities Program and the early Teacher Corps program did it dawn on teacher education institutions and school officials that teachers recruited for rural areas needed special training and counseling on what would be required of them.

It is a "special calling" to which teachers often must adjust without the benefit of personal and professional support systems available in metropolitan areas. Superintendent Gene Maxim of Carnation, Wash., for example, said that his district, determining four years ago to set up a process to achieve quality teaching, put its priority on staff hiring. Recruitment policies, he said, were planned carefully to make sure potential teacher candidates understood the community, the needs of the students and their specific responsibilities.

While there was no specific focus at the conference on innovative teacher training programs, evidently many of the participants either profited from training available to rural educators or employed teachers and administrators who were part of the "new wave" of those specifically prepared for rural school positions.

For the past three summers, the University of Alaska at Fairbanks has conducted a six-week orientation program for new teachers headed for the "bush country," which for a great part of the school year may be accessible to the outside only by dogsled or airplane. The teachers learn how to be versatile in their teaching, to understand the culture of the communities in which they will teach, to integrate Alaska's new educational technologies into school programs -- and to handle personal isolation.

Brigham Young University in Utah has a cooperative relationship with 10 rural school districts for field-based, competencies-centered experiences for student teachers. The student teachers must spend eight to 16 weeks in a rural community, working under a local teacher and completing much of their coursework by using the resources of two rural training centers, both more than 100 miles from the university campus. The developers believe the program has been successful because a high percentage of the students indicated they would prefer to live and teach in rural areas, and the school districts have tended to hire those who served them as trainees.

The most effective rural teachers, studies show, are those who were reared in rural communities themselves. According to a report from the Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools at New Mexico State University, a group of local superintendents in rural Idaho created a special training program for local residents. The school administrators

in 53 different rural communities agreed that their districts' long-time residents included many who were outstanding teacher prospects but lacked the teacher certification requirements. Working as a consortium through Idaho State University, the districts developed syllabi for a dozen professional courses offered in the local communities, primarily through "hands-on" experience in the schools. Those who needed courses to complete subject matter requirements used extension services and correspondence courses.

In their personal way, rural communities also have sought links with faculty at teacher training institutions. When the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa provided a two-day inservice training course on new teaching methods to teachers in one rural community school, other university personnel, including professors, graduate students and seniors who had finished their student teaching, took over the teachers' classes. Families in the community hosted the visiting "substitute teachers." A rural Georgia community, Alma, didn't want its inservice training managed by those who had no feel for the community. Through Georgia Southern College, it developed a project in which four college professors provided graduate courses at Alma, working in the classrooms with the teachers. While there, they also served as consultants on the curriculum.

A unique university-based four-year experiment in North Dakota ended about 10 years ago, but its influence lingers and has contributed to an acceptance of innovative approaches in the state's mostly rural public schools.

The New School for Behavioral Studies at Grand Forks was established to help non-degree teachers (59 percent of the state's elementary

teachers at the beginning of the project) attain degrees and to help redirect the state's teaching mode to a less structured, more individualized approach, modeled after "open classroom" concepts. The teachers would spend a year's leave-of-absence at the Grand Forks campus, replaced by interns who were master's degree candidates, also trained in open classroom philosophy.

The New School now has a different name (the Center for Teaching and Learning), its programs have changed, and its staff has adjusted to teacher candidates with less of the fire of reform in their eyes and more of a back-to-basics interest. But, says a recent report on the experiment:

> "The fundamental philosophy and program of the New School persists. New School graduates form the largest coherent group of educators in North Dakota. Former interns, less-than-degree teachers, and undergraduates trained in the New School's program have become principals and superintendents, directors of teachers' centers and teacher training programs throughout the state. The root concepts of informal instruction have become part of the fabric of North Dakota education . . . ."

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## MEETING THE NEEDS OF SPECIAL CHILDREN

In serving special populations, rural schools have perhaps their most formidable challenge yet, where the special populations constitute a

majority, such as blacks or Indians, they have perhaps some of their most outstanding successes.

In spite of tremendous costs, small rural school districts have adjusted to the mandates of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) more easily than might be supposed. One reason, Faith Dunne points out, is that mainstreaming handicapped children into regular classrooms is an extension of a rural teacher's pattern of handling heterogeneous classrooms. Receiving additional funding to do this may reduce the challenge to a rural teacher, not extend it. In her study, more than 63 percent of those surveyed feel their special education services are effective in meeting the needs of handicapped students, although one of the inevitable "costs," emotionally as well as financially, is the necessity to send more severely handicapped students away. Undoubtedly, the sharing of services of personnel among rural school districts and the provision of services through educational service agencies have alleviated many problems for rural areas.

Yet, a 1979 survey indicated a shortage of 5,000 special education personnel for rural schools. In response, the National Rural Research and Personnel Preparation Project at Murray (Ky.) State University has initiated a rural personnel exchange data system, aimed at encouraging special education teachers to locate temporarily (desirably for one year) in rural areas on an exchange basis. Annual turnover rates of special education personnel, its surveys show, are as high as 50 percent. The project also provides data, models of personnel preparation for rural areas, and information on exemplary projects, Director Doris Helge reported to the conference. Rural areas also may draw on the

resources of SPECIALNET, a computerized information network that can overcome geographic barriers of isolated schools.

Garrett County in western Maryland has modified the turnover problem by going to its community. "We attempt to interest college-bound students in becoming special educators or specialists in related areas," said Sarah Wilson, supervisor of special education services for the county schools. "We approach local civic organizations to underwrite college expenses through scholarships or direct loans with the teacher's option of returning to the area, staying for a period of time and not repaying the loan." The schools also hire specialists from other agencies in the community on a part-time basis and help local residents gain certification through special inservice programs. These often bring "consortium trainers" from colleges and universities into the area to provide the courses and advanced degree work, giving teachers an opportunity to update their skills without commuting to cities and to see results with students under the direction of experienced professionals.

"We find that if we can provide incentives to the people who want to maintain the benefits of rural living," Wilson said, "we can keep our staff. They know us, we are a part of the community and we are dedicated to making their community 'the best.'"

## WHAT ABOUT THE GIFTED?

The gifted and talented are not served by the same universal mandate as the handicapped, although some states have written requirements for special programs into their legislation for the handicapped, or separately. Educational service agencies, again, offer the best means for rural school districts to serve the gifted and talented, either

through direct sponsorship of programs or through staff development, provision of resources, and linking schools with exemplary program models.

Rural school district resources, often through modest grants from the states or state-managed federal programs (now part of the block grant), seem to have concentrated on inservice teacher training -- helping all teachers learn to identify the gifted and provided them with enrichment. Some use Saturday programs, extensive field trips and summer camps to supplement programs for the gifted. Students in gifted classes from the Jefferson County, Ky., schools exchanged with a group from Boone County, allowing the city children and their country cousins to enjoy visits of four days in each community. And a teacher of the gifted in Iowa recognized that rural students, if they stay in their communities, will have multiple leadership roles as adults -- in churches, civic groups, local government bodies. She developed a leadership training unit for the gifted and talented, helping them analyze leadership skills and apply them to community problems. The course was so popular that the teacher, at the request of the community, now also offers it as a night course for adults.

## OVERCOMING MINORITY NEGLECT

Enough of a picture of the rural South has been drawn to give a sense of the cyclical influence of poverty and neglected education, but where a minority community has control and the will to change the situation, patterns can be broken.

Superintendent Earnest Palmer's 2,300-pupil school system, Perry County, Ala., is 83 percent black, 90 percent low income and

educationally disadvantaged. It is generally representative of a 17-county area of Alabama, a 12-county area in Mississippi and a four-county area in Georgia. In addition to their poverty and dependence on an agrarian economy these areas, he told the conference, are identical to each other because of their political framework. The school boards are elected, and the situation was frustrating for the black community until it was able to elect a black-controlled school board. Since then, he said, the curriculum has been revised, programs have been evaluated, and the community has formed a restatement of its educational goals. The facilities are better, rote learning has been replaced by small groups learning to use new technologies, and the staff is better trained. The old television version of what it's like to be educated in the South "doesn't exist in Perry County anymore," Palmer said.

Part of the progress can be attributed to various federal programs, and as these decrease, Palmer is seeking linkages to groups, business-industry and various coalitions to retain the programs. Coalitions particularly are important, he emphasized, because they provide a new perspective on meeting the needs of poor children, linking housing, economic development, transportation and nutrition to education.

The Chippewa Creek people at Box Elder, Mont., (pop. 150), always figured their schools were going to be eliminated one way or another -- either because they were rural or because they were Indian. The attitude in the 1960s, Bert Corcoran, superintendent of the Rocky Boy School at Box Elder, told the conference, was that "if you want to go to high school, find your own way." Although a new elementary school was built on the reservation in 1960, high school students still had to travel 45

miles for their classes. Finally, a decade later, the Indian people said they wanted control of their own schools, to educate their children in traditional ways -- their ways.

When Corcoran took over the school, he faced several sensitive problems. For one, "people on the reservation had always been told what to do," and managing their own schools was a considerable challenge. Further, the school staff was 100 percent non-Indian, and there were not enough natives on the reservation qualified to teach. The first step he took was to select promising high school graduates and put them through a tough teacher training program. "In just over four years we had role models, people from our community, and this changed the whole atmosphere of the school," he said.

The second major task was to prepare teaching materials relevant to the Indians' traditional ways. Through the use of bilingual funds, the school and the staff developed enough curriculum material to maintain the culture of the people, but it took almost five years. Local people were the authorities, the specialists, on the content of the materials, he added.

Another objective was the use of the environment of the reservation, an essential part "of our spiritual being." The elders, whom Corcoran said were the "teachers" on any reservation, helped develop a taxonomy of the plants found on the reservation, many of which had been used as medicine for generations.

Finally, a Head Start program became part of the education system on the reservation. "Parents really believe in it," Corcoran said, "and extending education to the 4-year-olds has made all the difference in

the world." Adult education also has become part of the school's offerings.

From a beginning where cultural values and traditions had almost been eradicated from the education of the 1,400 young Indians at Box Elder, Corcoran's decade at the school has seen the traditions restored, and the self-confidence of students and the community blossom. Some of the students now have master's degrees, one is a doctor, "and more are coming back to the reservation and using their skills," he said.

THE HOPE OF TECHNOLOGIES

Finally, in this review of the strengths and the factors contributing to the improvement of rural education, we turn to the newest, the most profound and one that potentially can enhance all other efforts. This is the integration of technologies into the countryside.

A recent survey completed by Educational Operations Concepts Inc. found that school boards and school administrators definitely believe technology provides a rural school with greater flexibility in the curriculum and can help overcome distance, transportation and cost barriers rural schools face in providing quality programs.

For example, in an area where "there are no stoplights or parking meters and six times more cattle than people," Project Circuit has connected eight rural school districts in west central Wisconsin. Instead of cutting programs because of declining enrollments and fiscal resources, the school districts are expanding their offerings through interactive video and audio communications. "It is an attempt at the movement of instruction to students, rather than the movement of students to instruction," Ellsworth Beckmann, coordinator of Project CIRCUIT at

Osseo, Wisc., told the conference. The schools now are offering courses never considered before, including Spanish, digital computer logic, computer literacy, German, advanced math, careers and television production, and are planning for physics. Summer and evening courses in creative writing and adult computer literacy also are available to the school communities.

At the 400-student high school in Maple Lake, Minn., 98 percent of the students now graduate with at least a nine-week course in computer literacy, and one-third of the graduates have taken two quarters of computer science, reported Mary James, educational coordinator of computing instruction at the high school. Impetus for the Maple Lake program, and others throughout Minnesota, is the 9-year-old Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium, which covers 430 school districts and 30 postsecondary institutions.

Both James and Van Sweet, superintendent at Dos Palos, Calif., commented that educators are aware of how much technology will dominate the job market for current high school students. In California, Sweet predicted, 50 percent of all new jobs will be in high technology.

Long before "Silicon Valley" became part of our vernacular, the State of Alaska had experimented with, shaped, modified and totally applied an integrated telecommunications system for its 52 school districts, most of which are small and rural and contain some of the most isolated schools in the country.

Alaska was included in some of the earliest satellite projects used for education, but while other states or regions considered the demonstrations just that, Alaska continued its development of the new technology and branched far beyond. Today, Alaska's schools probably are

the most "wired" ones in the country. Before the state used new technologies to link its school districts and state department of education with each other, it sometimes took two weeks to move mail across the state, one divided by four time zones. Now, messages can reach their destination in a few minutes via electronic mail. The Educational Telecommunications for Alaska project also produced a computer-assisted high school instructional program, an invaluable aid to small high schools where perhaps only one teacher must provide a full range of courses. Also, the new Learn/Alaska Network makes audioconferences possible and has been used for staff development and school district training workshops. The second part of this network is a satellite instructional TV channel, which will reach children throughout a state that, superimposed on the lower 48, would stretch from California to the Atlantic Ocean.

In the lower 48, the Littlefork-Big Falls public schools in northern Minnesota near the Canadian border, enroll 600 students who have access to an unusual learning center. This small classroom is equipped with 14 carrels, computers and a conference table. Students can choose self-instruction in about 50 different courses, using videotapes, traditional audiovisual media, correspondence courses and computers. The Smyrna, Del., Middle School has eight teletype computer terminals linked to a time-sharing system at far-away Wilmington, providing computer-assisted instruction to about 140 handicapped students. The school administration plans to add 32 terminals in the elementary grades this year, part of a long-range goal to provide every student with one hour a day of computer time.

The high school students at Pangburn, Ark., are publishing the first newspaper in this rural community in 60 years, using a computerized type-setting process. Five years ago, a teacher in the Banks school district in northwest Oregon began offering an elective electronics course, appropriate for students whose community was within commuting distance of several large electronic companies. Now, the program has 17 desk top computers and audio- and videotapes. There are more than a dozen computers in the elementary school, with the expansion fully backed by the community and electronics computer industries in the area.

Students are not the only ones to benefit from the new technologies.

Eastern Montana College at Billings serves a 40,000-square-mile area, and until recently the traditional inservice training by an instructor traveling to school districts was quite costly. Using federal funds, the college developed the Montana Educational Telecommunication System which can hook up 20 sites to a central class at one time. The instructor is located on the main campus and connected to remote classrooms by telephone; students can ask questions or comment at any time, using resource materials distributed beforehand.

While some rural schools obviously have not been laggard about adopting new technologies, it should be pointed out that in most instances they needed financial and planning help. Of the many programs studied by Educational Operations Concepts, federal funding played a part in a majority of them; many had been started by state or private funds. At the heart of all of them, however, were creative teachers and supportive administrators.

## BARRIERS TO EXCELLENCE

If the strengths of rural education are impressive, as the preceding pages perhaps indicate, they should be considered even more so when one looks at the obstacles rural schools must overcome. Many, many rural schools and millions of rural schoolchildren must cope with problems that consume energies and limited resources. In most instances, the answers can't be copied from others. Rural education's needs require uniquely rural solutions.

* * * *

### TRAINING AND RETRAINING OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

While creative training models for rural school staffs exist, they are tiny lights in a dark landscape.

Teachers in rural schools, Jerry Horn, associate dean of the College of Education at Kansas State University, told the conference, have a "bimodal pattern." Most have either less than three years of teaching experience or more than 10 years. Some studies indicate a 30 percent turnover rate each year among rural faculty. They leave, he said, for several reasons:

* Professional isolation,
* Social isolation,
* Inadequate/unrealistic preparation,
* Excessive job-related demands,
* Limited opportunities for advancement.

Blaming recruitment policies and efforts of school administrators is not fair, Horn said. "People don't decide to teach in a particular area or size school at age 22. Little encouragement is provided before or in teacher education programs for students to teach in small schools, and only in rare cases does one find programs that attempt to prepare teachers for small schools." In fact, he added, several colleges in one study indicated that teachers should not be prepared for specialized settings, such as rural schools. It is awesome to consider that one in three teachers in the United States -- or about 790,000 of them -- had little or no special training for the unique demands of their jobs in rural schools.

Why is teaching in a rural school different?

Rural teachers, said Pamela Young of London University (Great Britain), is asked to do all the traditional chores of teaching and "to be versatile, adept at improving current educational offerings, skilled in creating new ones, competent in evaluation and to take a leading part in directing their own improved functioning . . . . We also expect the teacher to be responsible for the all-round development of each child under his care . . . . All of this we ask of a teacher . . . working, perhaps alone, in a school where the contact with other professionals is often infrequent."

Speaking of his own experience teaching on a Maine island, Tom Gjelten has written:

> ". . . teachers are in a conspicuous position in the community, and while the attention is enjoyable, the lack of privacy may lead to feelings of vulnerability; the personalized atmosphere at school meant everyone was more affected by the pendular swing of morale; the

lack of materials and facilities encountered by all small schools was often frustrating; and our separation from other schools and other teachers made it easier for us to lose perspective on our work."

And Ivan Muse, professor of education at Brigham Young University, has summed up the differences that teachers, primarily trained at a city-based school of education, would find in rural areas:

* There is little opportunity to understand the job beforehand because few student teachers are able to request and be assigned to a small school setting over 40 miles away from the university or college they are attending.

* Rural teaching is more complicated. Teachers generally teach five to six different preparations each day. Extracurricular assignments (coaching, clubs, civic responsibilities) almost always are expected.

* Rural teachers generally have difficulty in securing adequate housing near the school location. Living conditions are generally poorer than urban areas although the rents are usually lower. (Currently, in a Montana boomtown, teachers are living in boxcars).

* Inservice experiences are lacking. Extensive travel is required to attend inservice workshops. Teachers must move to city areas during summers to work on advanced degrees.

* Geographic isolation creates conditions of fewer social activities and companionships, fewer health services and higher costs of maintaining households. This results in higher teacher turnovers.

* Teachers are more apt to be teaching subjects in other than their academic major although they probably are trained as specialists. They also will be more apt to have multiple grades in one classroom.

* Specialized classes and programs are more difficult to maintain, staff and conduct, creating lack of continuity and added cost to the districts.

If teachers who come to rural areas view their choice as temporary, certainly the salaries they receive generally reinforce this attitude. Rural teaching is not rewarded, salary-wise, as a special calling. If the cost of living evens out in all parts of the country, as economists say it will, a teacher would have to find a great deal of psychic value in open spaces and close personal relationships to compensate for a lower income.

Teachers who do stay frequently have strong ties to the community, often because they grew up there. While this factor means there is a good "fit" between the teacher's values and those of the community, it also means such teachers may resist efforts to change their classroom patterns. A principal of an island school in North Carolina commented that he never hired a local resident as a teacher -- "If they aren't any good, I would have a hard time getting rid of them." Further, there is some concern that such "homegrown" teachers provide limited role models for students, especially girls.

Because they work so much more in isolation and away from ordinary professional stimulation, rural teachers may see less need to update their skills, unaware of its importance, an attitude often reinforced by local communities and their school boards which feel that teachers are educated, so why do they need more? On the other hand, where creative projects and techniques to improve teaching in rural schools have been used, such as was previously described in North Dakota, improvements that fit teachers and communities may be easier to implement than in urban

schools because change becomes personal and shared, something talked about and not confined to an evaluation sheet.

One of the more successful rural teachers' centers, Regional In-Service Education (RISE), serving nine small towns in east central Connecticut, used "round robins" and "chat groups" to find out what teachers felt they needed in staff development. Superintendents and principals were interviewed personally by the RISE staff. Then followed staff development planning teams in each school in each town, all voluntary, which developed inservice training workshops and other opportunities suited to the needs of the school. Many were later shared on a townwide or regionwide basis.

Utah State University developed packets of self-instructional materials to help elementary classroom teachers train themselves to deal with mildly handicapped children in their classrooms. The Appalachian Education Satellite Project and Alaska's use of satellite radio have brought inservice training to remote areas.

While rural teachers' centers and exploitation of new technologies show that inservice training can be adapted to rural needs, the tragedy is that so little is happening. Educational service agencies can supplement staff development activities, but too often their programs are urban or suburban-designed models that result in little change in rural classrooms. In rural Maine, for example, the National Diffusion Network apparently has been a big success, but a closer examination of the program revealed this method of change, originally based on the rural model of agricultural extension agents, seemed to have resulted in a pattern of urban and surburban districts as the innovators of programs and rural districts as imitators. Also, few of the very small schools in Maine had adopted projects.

Robert Shafto, director of the Maine Facilitator Center, believes the response to NDN adoptions in Maine has been "fairly good" in view of the obstacles. In the past seven years, about 30 percent of the schools with under 200 students enrolled have adopted programs, and 60 percent of those between 200 and 1,000 enrollment have done so. This compares to an 83 percent rate in districts with more than 3,000 students.

Small rural schools respond less to outside innovations, Shafto says, for several reasons. They view state or federal programs with suspicion, and their geographic isolation is a true barrier. There is a frequent turnover of teachers and administrators in these districts, they have limited financial resources and seldom hire full-time administrators concerned with curriculum matters. Many give a low priority to inservice education and curriculum development.

Both rurally oriented teachers' centers and technology-delivered inservice training require support that must come at least partially from outside, through state and federal resources. Only in a few places do rural school districts have the resources to compete for funding, even when they are aware of the benefits of specially tailored inservice training for rural teachers.

## CURRICULA FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

If children in rural areas must be prepared to lead productive, satisfying lives -- anywhere and under conditions imposed by the next century -- shouldn't they have the same basic fare as their peers in the cities and suburbs? Yet, shouldn't they also be able to draw from the strengths of their own environment for relevant, economical and quality curricula? As illustrated earlier, projects such as Foxfire prove the

validity of using the local environment and culture to encourage academic achievement, community pride and skill training that will be useful in careers. Most rural schools, however, haven't taken advantage of this kind of resource or others that are available.

Some lack of interest in examining the curricula and seeking improvements can be blamed on the resistance in rural areas to outside pushes and an unquestioned faith in traditional schooling. However, an examination of the reasons for this often softens criticism. Geographic isolation, for example, creates an insular attitude. School board members and school administrators have fewer opportunities for informal interactions with their peers or those with innovative ideas for rural schools. Similarly, teachers have fewer contacts. Their staff development opportunities are limited. If they do attend summer programs for advanced training, for example, they are offered few ideas, exchanges and resources tailored specifically for rural schools. With inspiration opportunities so distant, it is less likely that the local community and its resources will be involved in developing improved curricula -- which may be a crucial element in assuring their adoption.

Having to stretch their funds thinly, state departments of education may be more inclined to provide help in curricula to schools where more students will be affected. Further, the impact of changing job markets or new technologies and of research on instructional techniques and curriculum content takes much longer to reach rural schools.

A root cause for many of these programs is money. Because of isolation and sparsity, services and resources to improve curricula in rural schools cost much more to deliver.

Yet, frequently rural educators instinctively know what should be done, even if they can't afford it.

Education in rural areas, said Gail Parks, former director of the education project for the National Rural Center, should help students "cross regional, national and international realms. Yet, she emphasized, there are distinctive features of rural communities that should be considered unique opportunities. These include:

* Proximity to agriculture, fishing or other occupations based on natural resources.

* Diverse rural cultures, along with local histories that are untapped in too many instances.

* A smaller scale in communities, along with a limited number of institutions to serve multiple needs.

The director of the Goddard Teachers' Center at Plainfield, Celia Houghton, said it more personally, at a "workparty" in Vermont for teachers and center directors:

"I question whether a city person really can understand how things happen in a very rural area. It seems that children must see things in cycles. In a very little while, as you have probably noticed the leaves here in Vermont will change and this place will be a fire, a spectacular place. And then will come the white, and then will come the mud, and then will come the rebirth, and it is very visible and very dramatic. It just seems to me that children, particularly in farm areas, see the cycles . . . . I think that learning happens by connecting a new experience with a previous experience. The child's

own statement about himself comes out of his own experience. A predetermined curriculum that doesn't take into account the richness of those experiences and that undervalues some of the great strengths in rural living makes children appear slow, because people are trying to teach them something that doesn't match with children's own experiences. I wouldn't want to say at all that rural children learn differently, only that children learn by connecting new information with what their previous experiences are. We mess them up by trying to teach them something that doesn't match and by not looking at what the child is focusing on."

Gjelten, in previous writings, takes this "feeling" about the curriculum for rural students and translates it into an outline of the essentials of that curriculum. It would have, he says, these features:

* A strong foundation in the teaching of basic skills and essential facts. "If anything," he wrote in Schooling in Isolated Communities, "teachers in a rural school are perhaps in a better position to convey these skills. Children learn best in the kind of atmosphere which is characteristic of rural classrooms: warm and informal, with constant personal attention, in the company of familiar people, and close to home both physically and socially."
* An emphasis on practical skills. Practical knowledge, he said, is much more highly valued in traditional rural communities than abstract knowledge -- and much more accessible, often out the back door of the school.
* Training in self-directed study and the development of initiative. Unlike urban students who must adjust to large-group

instruction, students in rural areas must learn how to gather information on their own, work without supervison and take more responsibility for their learning. These are not learned automatically, he stressed, but must be taught sequentially with as much emphasis as academic skills.

* A focus on the community, understanding its history, diversity, economics and role in the region and nation.

* An orientation to familiarizing students with the outside world. Students may know a lot about other places but often have little experience with them. Even for those who stay in their communities after graduation, "knowing how to manage relations with people and institutions from outside the community is more necessary than ever before," he wrote.

* Attention to the futures of the students. Rural schools must be concerned about what happens to students once they leave, and their "experiences within the curriculum of the school need to leave them with a sense of control over their future: a conviction that they are choosing among options with which they are familiar . . . ."

If curriculum standards become higher and more universal, say for college admissions, rural schools will face new problems to overcome. Providing four years of a foreign language in secondary schools, for example, will require truly creative staffing and/or uses of technologies.

Also, the predicted teacher shortage in this decade will have an even greater impact on rural schools, where some shortages exist already and the pool of willing teachers is small.

## A SPECIAL PROBLEM: RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS

The two foregoing problems of teacher training and retraining and of a rurally relevant curriculum bear down most heavily on rural high schools. Providing superior education in rural elementary schools is much closer to reality and much more possible.

To compensate for their isolation, rural high schools need extraordinary resources and extraordinarily resourceful teachers. Others have pointed out that the underlying standard of the high school curriculum is college preparatory in most rural areas and thus a copy of urban models. Rural schools cannot provide the variety of courses, the kinds of facilities and the specialists to teach in them as do urban and suburban schools, thus they come up short in any comparison. "Small rural schools need a different set of rules to play by," says Paul Natchigal.

From various presentations at the conference and other reports, a general outline can be developed for rural high schools:

* High school teachers need to be generalists, not specialists, able to teach more than one academic area and willing to work in an interdisciplinary fashion. This will require a re-examination of both teacher training and certification. Rural teachers also need to know how to supervise and creatively direct independent study, especially when and if new technologies enable students to have a broader range of resources.

* High schools must build into their curriculum and services the notion of choice for students. Rather than an unexamined view that students will leave the community or an assumption, especially in poor areas, that they always will live in marginally productive rural areas,

more high schools need to provide a basic curriculum that will allow students to function well as adults wherever they are. Additionally, through student exchanges, field trips and career options, students need experiences with their options outside.

* The high school curriculum needs to draw from the community environment. Already richly endowed with community support, the small rural high school can repay with an investment in that community. For example, Ron Colton of the Mountain View Center for Environmental Education at the University of Colorado is working with an education lab to develop an exemplary science curriculum for small rural high schools, with what is as naturally available as the textbook. One of his units is a study of weeds, which leads students into a study of plant propagation, weed control, pros and cons of chemical use, soil analysis and wind and weather.

Daryl Hobbs of the University of Missouri suggested that students can be the core of rural development in a community. They could, he said, do economic inventories, such as what services people would purchase closer to home if they were available. Vocational training tied to the results of such a survey would give students an entrepreneurship option to stay in the community. High school students on Ocracoke Island, N.C., who rarely number enough to fill their corner of the island's one-room schoolhouse, use an environmental science program that sends them up and down the beach to measure wind and water erosion and to hearings on tourist and fishing industry developments. These are crucial to their future because most of the students prefer to remain in the community.

Again, exemplary ideas to improve the high school curriculum exist, but are used too infrequently. What's more, many, if not most, of the ideas that have proved successful for rural schools are not expensive to develop, but as declining enrollments or increasing tax burdens pinch school budgets even further, any expenditure to change from traditional ways may be resisted by school boards and communities.

## A SPECIAL AREA OF NEED: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

If providing vocational education programs that help young people be assimilated into the current job market yet remain flexible for a changing workplace presents a dilemma for urban and suburban schools, picture the layers of problems added to rural schools.

It is in fashioning an adequate link between school and work that the factors of isolation and sparsity present formidable barriers. Because of transportation problems, many students cannot take advantage of area vocational centers. Where vocational education exists, its orientation may not fit with the future needs of the student because of a combination of unawareness of these needs, lack of retraining for vocational educators, improper or expensive equipment and community sentiment for traditional offerings. Particularly trapped by these shortcomings are women and minorities. Vocational education for them often leads to low-paying occupations, a factor that greatly contributes to the general underemployment of rural residents.

This is not to imply that vocational education hasn't changed for rural students over the years. Training young people who would assume ownership of family farms gave way to training for the corporate needs of both farming and industrialization of rural areas. Some rural school

systems have responded to the increase in entrepreneurship in rural areas, redirecting training to the needs of small businesses.

Generally, however, the current status of vocational education is a confusing picture of mixed values, uncertain futures and limited help for communities wanting to develop strong, relevant programs for their youth. Vocational education and community economic development must fit together--and where they do, the benefits accrue to both individuals and the community, as pointed out in the Staples, Minn., and Alaskan natives projects. Sometimes, communities have responded to outside investments in their areas with vocational training geared to the investment interests, only to discover that when the labor supply becomes overeducated, and less cheap, the industries move on, or that the managerial levels never are opened to locally trained people. School leaders need help in negotiating viable futures for their students who remain in the communities. As a part of this, state and federal policy-makers need to be aware of the need to construct carefully rural economic development and vocational education.

Further, there has been little exploration of the influence of technology on rural vocational offerings, both to what changes it implies in training and to how technologies can assist in that training.

Another issue that requires specific attention is how radically to alter vocational education for women and minorities. A longitudinal study of career decisions by Southern rural youth illustrates the problem. The Texas A & M University study found that female aspirations tended to be restricted to traditional "female pursuits," such as secretary, nurse or beautician. Black female senior high school students rarely chose "housewife" as a preferred vocation, but in reality, this is

what most of them became. Superintendent Earnest Palmer of the primarily rural and minority Perry County, Ala., schools told the conference that despite his efforts to bring resources into schools, an important motivating factor was missing: "I don't have any role models for my kids," he said.

Closely tied to the problems of strong vocational education programs for youth is the problem of adult education in rural communities, particulary those in the South. Nearly one of every four black males in rural areas, those over 25 years of age, has not completed the fifth grade. Further, only 47 percent of white males on farms and 57 percent of white males in rural, but non-farm areas, had completed high school, according to 1975 statistics, as compared to 72 percent of suburban and 66 percent of central city white males. Only 16 percent of black females living on farms had completed high school.

Vocational training needs are changing, economic development is broadening more into rural areas, and the minimum standards for literacy are increasing because of new skill levels needed to function in society. Rural schools, together with technical and community colleges and industrial training programs, need to make sure adults, too, have the educational resources they need.

A LINGERING PROBLEM: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

The need to complete the task of equality of opportunities for good education takes several forms in rural education.

Almost half the states make no provision in their funding formulas for the special financial burdens imposed by distance and sparcity in rural areas, even though every state has pockets of rural schools. Further, these often are inadequately structured and/or funded.

We also have mentioned the concentration of minority poverty and the special education needs it produces, especially in the South, as well as the equity problem that exists for girls in rural schools.

A new, and potentially greater, disequalizer than any other now present is the increasing use of new technologies by rural schools. Where they are in place, they are broadening the curriculum, opening up choices for students and individualizing instruction. But their availability to students is sporadic, dependent on local leadership and the willingness to finance innovations and/or training by regional and state agencies. If these efforts are not balanced universally, the isolation of those without the advantages of new technologies will become ever more limiting.

## WHAT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE

We have maintained throughout this report that rural schools are too different from each other to suggest a "rural solution," so it may seem inappropriate now to make some general recommendations. Yet there were some underlying themes, both stated and implied, that surfaced at the rural education conference and that have been emphasized in our discussions of strengths and weaknesses of rural schools.

Interestingly, although rural school administrators and rural communities in general often are wary of outside pressures for change, almost all of the rural education conference speakers, whether rural educators, researchers, university faculty or public officials, said rural schools need help. The proposed solutions varied greatly, from the establishment of a national "rural policy" to merely the exemption of rural schools from some paperwork regulations.

It was obvious, however, that the past self-reliance and dogged determinedness of rural schools to survive despite neglect and inappropriate policies imposed on them aren't good enough anymore. The same egalitarian goals -- to educate all children to their maximum potential -- that have characterized urban and suburban schools for the last two decades are shared by most rural educators. To give rural youth the option of staying or leaving, to prepare them to handle changing social values yet value their heritage, to take advantage of new technologies, to become the focal point for economic and cultural development within their communities, to have the teachers and administrators who can shoulder these challenges -- will require many helping hands for rural schools.

They need:

* Adequately trained teachers and administrators. If a few teacher training institutions can understand the importance of tailoring preservice and inservice programs to the needs of rural schools, many more should be able to do so. If some state legislatures can provide leadership in recognizing and supporting improved training for rural schools, such as North Dakota's initiation of a process to help rural schools define their training needs, more can do so. If rural teachers' centers, financed with outside funds, have proved highly successful in helping teachers improve their classroom content and procedures, they should not be allowed to wither away.

The rural education scene is so special that no model or pat prescription is sufficient. Part of the training for a rural educator, for example, must take into account an orientation to the social isolation of rural communities, which partially accounts for the high turnover rate of teachers. Rural teachers must be as adept at community relations as at student relations, must be willing to be generalists and must be self-starters in seeking professional development.

In training, recruitment and professional support, the overarching goal should be to make teaching or administering in rural schools a distinct vocation, not a stepping stone to other jobs.

* Opportunities to develop rurally relevant curricula. Faith Dunne found that the most successful change-producing efforts in rural schools were those where teachers received small grants (usually from the old Title IV-B program) to develop more fully an idea based on

their experiences with rural classrooms. These also should be considered important enough to continue. Curriculum consultants with state or regional agencies also need training to help them understand and assist with curriculum development suited for rural schoolchildren and capitale on the resources familiar to them. In addition, special attention needs to be given to the promises of technology in rural education curricula. Through mini-computers, telecommunications and other innovations, the effects of isolation and limited staff expertise can be countered.

* Assessment of the instructional needs of rural students in light of new technologies, future employment requirements, equity for girls and minorities, knowledge of improved teaching techniques and more challenging content of basic courses, and increasing links between rural concerns and those of metropolitan, national and international spheres. These must be joint and not imposed efforts because, as those who understand rural communities best keep reminding us in the literature, rural education leaders will respond positively only to solutions that surface from their own traditions and values.

* Long-range planning. Rural educators need information and expertise to go beyond immediate needs and examine the potential vitality of their communities in the years ahead and how educational opportunities will help fulfill that potential. Too many rural communties and schools have been left out of long-range planning by regional and state officials that promoted rural industrialization. They have been promised their efforts to improve education would open up higher skilled jobs for their youth, only to find low-skill industries moving on and higher skilled industries importing workers.

* Sensitivity to the "rural situation" in financing and mandates by state and national officials. Frank Darnell, writing in a report of a rural education conference held in Australia, makes a bold statement that a specific formula for financing rural education can lead to a "trap." Rather, he writes, "fairness requires that funds be allocated in a variety of ways and amounts." While this seems unattainable from an administrative viewpoint in this country, it illustrates the extreme care with which funding formulas must consider the diseconomies of isolation, distance and sparcity. One seriously handicapped child, Faith Dunne reminded the conference, "could cost a small rural district $20,000 or more a year in residential care," a disastrous financial burden for the school district, but one not acknowledged in state or federal formulas. While improving rural education should be a priority in all states, the need approaches a crisis in the Southern states. One-half of the nation's rural children and youth live in the South; among rural black youth, 96 percent live in the South. Obviously, special attention, programs, policies and funding need to be concentrated--by all levels of government--on these students and their families. Likewise, state officials, such as in Colorado, can seek ways to help rural schools try out innovations in scheduling, cost-saving measures, staff training and administrative flexibility. Dunne and others at the conference contend that rural schools also need exemptions from rules and regulations designed for large schools and districts.

* Careful examination of the impact of decreased federal funding on rural areas, especially those with heavy concentrations of economically disadvantaged children. This is not the only area, however, because many of the improvements in rural education in the past few years have come from the extra investments at the federal level -- making possible such things as teachers centers, mini-grants, mobile units from libraries and cultural agencies and staff development opportunities (such as National Science Foundation summer institutes for teachers). As priorities are set for what remains of federal funding, the losses to rural schools should be compensated fairly.

* Regional, state and national data banks that will make long-range planning possible and put rural educators in touch with resources they need. As one speaker pointed out at the conference, it was short-sighted to plan a meeting on rural education alone, just as it is ineffective to plan one on rural health or rural jobs. In our small communities, these factors are completely interrelated. Planning needs to be based on communities as a whole, but the resources needed too often are fragmented and disorganized at both state and national levels. A particular information need at the moment is on educational technology for rural schools.

* Cooperative Efforts. The most successful structure for sharing the resources of rural schools has been the educational service agency. These cooperatives function formally in 30 states, and informally in all states. Administrative and instructional services can be shared among several or up to 30 or 40 rural districts. Functions such as planning, computer services, special education,

vocational education and many others can be made available economically. State and federal regulations and funding patterns need to encourage educational service agencies. Other avenues for cooperation -- such as coalitions of civic groups, churches, universities, and public agencies are important also. These groups need to join with education providers in planning for the total economic development of a rural area.

Underlying all of these needs is the one of fostering leadership in local communities. It already is there. Rural communities are rich with leadership opportunities, but, as also has been stressed, various pressures on rural school systems will require leaders to do more than ever to assess the undeveloped human potential in their communities and integrate outside help with traditional strengths.

While there is no "rural model," there is, as many of the conference sessions indicated, a potential for "rural modeling." There are rural educators and other citizens successfully working to enhance their community life. If things get done in rural communities because of personal persuasion and leadership, then it would seem that the foundation for achieving excellence in rural education must make use of the same material -- of personal sharing. There need to be opportunities for those who have fashioned excellent rural education and rural community development programs to serve as catalysts for others. Rural teachers who have used the school environment well and developed flexibility in teaching need opportunities to talk to other teachers. University staff who have fashioned training programs that are helping rural schools need to show others in their profession how to do it. State officials, legislators and education chiefs who have shaped

successful policies for rural schools need to work with their peers on specific solutions for rural education problems. School board members who have shaped better communities out of better schools need to tell others how they too could.

Perhaps the framework to make such sharing possible calls for a national "rural policy." However, channels exist already, such as state and national associations of school administrators, school board members and regional service agency administrators; teachers' groups; parent associations; the Education Commission of the States; and associations of higher education institutions, specifically the teacher training departments.

Waiting for all rural communities to appreciate the need to learn from each other is too slow a process for the millions of children now enrolled in rural schools, whose productive adulthood primarily will be spent in the first half of a very different, very complex next century. But perhaps the traditional caution of rural communities to change is due to limited opportunities to help each other. A program to link rural leaders with each other is worth pursuing and certainly in agreement with rural values.

* * * *

As rural schools grow stronger on the experiences of each other, integrating change into a local network where the schools determine what the community accomplishes, they can become a model for larger schools and communities.

Education in rural America, Nachtigal has written, "is the one place where we really have a chance to put all of the pieces together."

As a young school board member in rural Southeast Minnesota, Albert Quie campaigned to consolidate surrounding schools. He eventually won, but after serving as an architect of much major education legislation in Congress and as governor of the state, he told the conference he doubts the wisdom of that early action. Despite improvements in education and advances in society, he said, achievement scores are falling and society has more unsolved problems. The assets of rural education -- full parent involvement, especially in the elementary grades, and community support ("the kind where everybody turns out for a school dedication"), and their emphasis upon hard work, generosity, discipline and cooperativeness -- are strengths other schools should emulate, Quie said.

The future of the nation, he ended, depends on the ability of our leadership to produce answers and solutions that avoid fads, that have the quality to make the world a safer place. We need to identify, he said, the educational experiences that encourage such leadership: "I am convinced that rural schools, where the smallness forces us to take an interest in each other, know about some of the ingredients we need."

Appendices

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
and the
Horace Mann Learning Center

*PRESENT*

# RURAL EDUCATION SEMINAR:

# "ENSURING EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION FOR RURAL AMERICA"

May 3-5, 1982

QUALITY INN-CAPITOL HILL
415 New Jersey Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C.

## Monday, May 3

9:00 a.m. Registration — Federal Ballroom North

10:00 a.m. Welcome
- Alicia Coro, Director
  Horace Mann Learning Center

**The Legacy of Rural Schools**

Introduction
- D. Jean Benish
  Acting Assistant Secretary
  Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Robert Worthington
  Assistant Secretary
  Office of Vocational and Adult Education
  Chair, U.S. Department of Education, Rural Education Committee
- Congressman Pat Williams, Montana
  Member, Subcommittee on Elementary,
  Secondary, and Vocational Education

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12:00 Noon Luncheon — Federal Ballroom South

**Musings of a Chief State School Officer on Nurturing of Rural Schools**

*Introduction*
D. Jean Benish

*Keynote Address*
The Honorable M. Anne Campbell, Commissioner of Education
Nebraska State Department of Education

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2:00 p.m. **THE REALITY OF RURAL SCHOOLING**

Convener
- Norman Hearn
  Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

**The Experience - What It's Like to be a Rural Educator**

Moderator
- Mary Helen White, Superintendent
  School Administrative District #54
  Skowhegan, Maine
- Earnest Palmer, Superintendent
  Perry County Schools
  Marion, Alabama
- Roger Baskerville, Superintendent
  Lohrville School District
  Lohrville, Iowa
- Dan Vogeler, One-Room Teacher and Trapper
  Browns Park School
  Greystone, Colorado

**The Rural Condition: Demographics and Characteristics**
- Faith Dunne, Chair, Department of Education
  Dartmouth College
  Hanover, New Hampshire
- Thomas Gjelten, Researcher
  Berman, Weiler Associates
  Berkeley, California

5:30 p.m. **Congressional Reception,** Room 2175, Rayburn Building
Sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators

## Tuesday, May 4

### Track I-Federal Ballroom North

Covener:
- Jimmy Horn
  Office of Management
  Intra-Agency Rural Education Committee

8:30 a.m. **Excellence Through Community Involvement**

Moderator:
- Jimmy Horn
- Frank Bouknight
  Superintendent
  Lee County Schools
  Bishopville, South Carolina

9:15 a.m. **Excellence Through Business and Community Cooperation**

Moderator:
- Rudy Cordova
  Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs
  Intra-Agency Rural Education Committee
- William Grimshaw
  Associate Director
  Community Leadership Training Center
  Western Michigan University
  Kalamazoo, Michigan
- Richard Johnson
  Superintendent
  Cashmere Public Schools
  Cashmere, Washington

10:00 a.m. **Excellence Through College and School Cooperation**

Moderator:
- Gary Hendrickson
  Office of Planning Budget and Evaluation
  Intra-Agency Rural Education Committee
- Ralph Kroon
  Western Montana College
  Dillon, Montana

### Track II-Congressional Room

Convener:
- Jesse Jordon
  Federal Interagency Committee on Education
  Intra-Agency Rural Education Committee

8:30 a.m. **Excellence Through Creative Recruitment and Retention of Staff**

Moderator:
- Gene Maxim
  Superintendent
  Lower Snoqualmie Valley Schools
  Carnation, Washington
- Jerry Horn
  Assistant Dean
  Kansas State University
  Manhattan, Kansas

9:15 a.m. **Excellence Through Sharing Staff and Facilities**

Moderator:
- James Jess
  Superintendent
  CAL Community School District
  Latimer, Iowa
- Dale Sorensen
  Superintendent
  Corwith-Wesley Community Schools
  Corwith, Iowa

10:00 a.m. **Excellence in Education for Native Americans**

Moderator:
- Frank Ryan
  Director of Indian Education
  U.S. Department of Education
- Bert Corcoran
  Superintendent
  Rocky Boy School
  Box Elder, Montana

## Track I-Federal Ballroom North

10:45 a.m. **Excellence Through Regional Service Centers**

Moderator:

- Walter Turner
  Associate Executive Director
  American Association of School Administrators
  Rosslyn, Virginia
- Hugh Pursel
  Director
  Northwest Kansas Education Service Center
  Colby, Kansas
- H. M. Fullerton
  Executive Director
  Region IX Education Service Center
  Witchita Falls, Texas

## Track II-Congressional Ballroom

10:45 a.m. **Excellence Through Flexibility in Organizing and Scheduling**

Moderator:

- Michael Rooney
  Superintendent
  Copeland Unified School District #476
  Copeland, Kansas
- Roy Brubacker
  Assistant Commissioner
  Colorado State Department of Education
  Denver, Colorado

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12:00 Noon — Luncheon — Federal Ballroom South

**The Rural Dimension of Excellence in Education**

*Introduction*

Donald Senese, Assistant Secretary
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

*Keynote Address*

Albert Quie, Governor, Minnesota
Member, National Commission on Excellence in Education

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2:00 p.m. **Excellence Through Enriching The Curriculum**

Moderator:

- Anita Lohr
  Superintendent
  Pima County Schools
  Tucson, Arizona
- Gail Parks
  Rural Education Consultant
  Trevilians, Virginia

2:45 p.m. **Excellence Through Community Development and Renewal**

Moderator:

- Gordon Hoke
  Associate Professor
  University of Illinois
  Champagne, Illinois
- Henry Hornbeck
  Superintendent
  Milford Township High School
  Milford, Illinois

2:00 p.m. **Excellence in Private and Public School Cooperation**

Moderator:

- Robert Seitzer
  Office for Private Education
  Intra-Agency Rural Education Committee
- Mary Lou Bartley
  Superintendent
  Riverdell Regional School District
  Oradel, New Jersey

2:45 p.m. **Excellence Through the Use of Networks, NDN Clearinghouse, Laboratories and Other Resources**

Moderator:

- Evert Edington
  Director
  Clearinghouse for Rural Education and Small Schools
  New Mexico State University
  Las Cruces, New Mexico
- Gene Johnson
  Facilitator
  National Diffusion Network
  Staples, Minnesota

## Wednesday, May 5

9:00 a.m. — Congressional Room

**COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY** — A New 16mm. color film that includes the reenactment of a one-room country school classroom shot at Centennial Village in Greeley, Colorado.

### Track I-Executive/Judicial Room

Convener:
Ray Simches
Special Assistant for Special Education Programs
Intra-Agency Rural Education Committee

10:00 a.m. **Excellence Through Use of Modern Technologies**

Moderator:
- Van Sweet
  Superintendent
  Dos Palos Joint Union School District
  Dos Palos, California
- Elworth Beckman,
  Coordinator, Project Circuit
  Osseo Fairchild School
  Osseo, Wisconsin
- Mary James
  Educational Coordinator of Computing Instruction
  Maple Lake High School
  Maple Lake, Minnesota

11:00 a.m. **Excellence for the Handicapped**

Moderator:
- Ron Welty
  Superintendent
  Gilmer County Schools
  Glenville, West Virginia
- Doris Helge
  Director
  National Rural Project
  Murray State College
  Murray, Kentucky

### Track II-Congressional Room

Covener:
- Byron Rawles
  Office of Vocational and Adult Education
  Intra-Agency Rural Education Committee

10:00 a.m. **Excellence Through Creative Vocational Education Programs**

Moderator:
- Roger Baskerville
  Superintendent
  Lohrville School District
  Lohrville, Iowa
- Duane Lund
  Superintendent
  Independent School District #793
  Staples, Minnesota

11:00 a.m. **Excellence Through Adult Education Programming and Community Schools**

Moderator:
- Hugh Watson
  Superintendent
  School Administrative Unit #22
  Hanover, New Hampshire
- Sandra Robinson
  Director
  Adult Education
  Vermont State Department of Education
  Montpelier, Vermont

12:00 Noon — Luncheon — Federal Ballroom North

**Rural Futures**

*Introduction*
Jean Tufts, Assistant Secretary
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

*Keynote Address*
Dale Lick, President
Georgia Southern College
Statesboro, Georgia

## Wednesday, May 5

### Post Seminar Working Session

(for individuals listed and others making a statement)

2:00 p.m. **Gleanings for the Report on Excellence**

Convener:

- Thomas Schultz
  National Institute of Education

Chairman:

- Robert Stevens
  University of Maryland
  College Park, Maryland
- James Mecklenburger
  National School Boards Association
  Washington, DC
- Gail Parks
  Rural Education Consultant
  Trevilians, Virginia
- Joseph Newlin
  Rural Education Association
  Fort Collins, Colorado
- Helen Roberts
  American Association of State Colleges and Universities
  Washington, DC
- Ann Lewis
  National School Public Relations Association
  Washington, DC

Thomas Schultz, National Institute of Education, also served on the Seminar Program Planning Committee.

## Seminar Program Planning Committee

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| Norman E. Hearn | Chair, Program Planning Committee<br>Office of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| Frank Fratoe | U.S. Department of Agriculture |
| William Hinze | Office of Educational Research and Improvement |
| Robert Marshall | Office of Vocational and Adult Education |
| John Martin | Council of Chief State School Officers |
| James Mecklenburger | National School Boards Association |
| Mary Condon Gereau | Staff, The Honorable John Melcher, U.S. Senate |
| Gail Parks | Rural Education Consultant, Trevilians, Virginia |
| Helen Roberts | American Association of State Colleges and Universities |
| Stewart Rosenfield | National Institute of Education |
| Ray Simches | Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services |
| Robert Stevens | University of Maryland |
| Neil Storms | U.S. Department of Agriculture |
| Walter Turner | American Association of School Administrators |

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| Grace E. Watson | Chief, Education Forum Branch, Horace Mann Learning Center |
| Carol Rusaw | Education Forum Branch |
| Barbra Hickey | Graduate School, USDA |

NOTE: Some presentations will be tape recorded for release to radio stations via the Education Department Broadcast Service, 472-2729 and 1-800-424-0214 (toll free). For further information about this service, call Tom Lyon on 472-3850.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
HORACE MANN LEARNING CENTER

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